Characters

- ROSEMARY
- BROTHER RAT
- SISTER RAT
- JESUS
- JOSEPH
- MARY
- TWO WISE MEN
- SHEPHERD

BROTHER RAT *has a rat's head, a human body, a tail*. SISTER RAT *has a rat's belly, a human head, a tail*. ROSEMARY *wears a Holy Communion dress and has worms in her hair. Mass said in prayer voices that later turn to gnawing voices. They were two pale Negro children*.

Act

SCENE: *The rat's house. The house consists of a red carpet runner and candles. The light is the light of the end of a summer day*.

BROTHER RAT *is kneeling facing the audience*.

At the far left of the house stands a procession of JESUS, JOSEPH, MARY, TWO WISE MEN, *and a* SHEPHERD.

SISTER RAT *stands at the end of the red aisle*.

BROTHER RAT

Kay within our room I see our dying baby, Nazis, screaming girls and cursing boys, empty swings, a dark sun. There are worms in the attic beams.

(Stands.)

They scream and say we are damned. I see dying and grey cats walking. Rosemary is atop the slide. Exalted!

(Kneels again.)

Kay within our room I see a dying baby, Nazis, again they scream.

(Stands again.)

and say we are damned. Within our once Capitol I see us dying. Rosemary is atop the slide exalted.

SISTER RAT

We swore on Rosemary's Holy Communion book.

BROTHER RAT

Did you tell? Does anyone know?

(The procession watches.)

SISTER RAT

Blake, we swore on our father's Bible the next day in the attic.

BROTHER RAT

Did you tell Sister Rat, does anyone know?

(Kneels.)

It was Easter and my fear of holy days, it was because it was Easter I made us swear.

SISTER RAT

Brother Rat, it was not Easter. It was night after Memorial Day.

BROTHER RAT

NO, it was not after Memorial Day. It was the beginning of winter. Bombs fell. It was the War.

SISTER RAT

It was the War.

BROTHER RAT

Our fathers said everything was getting hung and shot in Europe. America wouldn't be safe long.

(Remains kneeling; procession marches across the house to center.)

SISTER RAT

Remember ... we lived in a Holy

Chapel with parents and Jesus, Joseph, Mary, our Wise Men and our Shepherd. People said we were the holiest children.

*(*BROTHER RAT *turns face front*. SISTER RAT *comes down the aisle. Procession is still*. SISTER RAT *walking.)*

Blake, our parents send me to Georgia. It is a house with people who say they are relatives and a garden of great sunflowers. Be my brother's keeper, Blake. I hide under the house, my rat's belly growing all day long I eat sunflower petals, I sit in the garden Blake and hang three gray cats.

(Stands before BROTHER RAT.)

Blake, I'm going to have a baby. I got our baby on the slide.

(Falls.)

Gray cats walk this house all summer I bury my face in the sand so I cannot bear the rats that hide in our attic beams. Blake, why did the War start? I want to hang myself.

BROTHER RAT

Kay, stop sending me the petals from Georgia. Stop saying our mother says you have to go to the State Hospital because of your breakdown. Stop saying you have a rat's belly.

(Procession marches across sound of rats.)

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

The Nazis!

(Marching.)

The Nazis have invaded our house.

(Softer.)

Why did the War start? We want to hang ourselves. The rats.

(Sound.)

The rats have invaded our Cathedral.

(They rapidly light more candles. Procession returns, marches to the center.)

Our old Rosemary songs. Weren't they beautiful! Our Rosemary Mass.

(Procession watches; silence.)

Yet we weren't safe long.

(They look at Procession.)

Soon we will be getting shot and hung. Within our house is a giant slide. Brother and Sister Rat we are.

SISTER RAT

Blake, remember when we lived in our house with Jesus and Joseph and Mary?

BROTHER RAT

Now there are rats in the church

books behind every face in the congregation. They all have been on the slide. Every sister bleeds and every brother has made her bleed. The Communion wine.
BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

The Communion wine. Our father gives out the Communion wine and it turns to blood, a red aisle of blood. Too something is inside the altar listening.

*(*SISTER RAT *kneels.)*

When we were children we lived in our house, our mother blessed us greatly and God blessed us. Now they listen from the rat beams.

(Sound rats. They remain kneeling. Sound rats.)

It is our mother.

Rosemary, Rosemary was the first girl we ever fell in love with. She lived next door behind a grape arbor her father had built. She often told us stories of Italy and read to us from her Holy Catechism book. She was the prettiest girl in our school. It is one of those midwestern neighborhoods, Italians, Negroes and Jews. Rosemary always went to Catechism and wore Holy Communion dresses.

BROTHER RAT

Where are you going Rosemary? we say. And she says, "I have to go to Catechism." Why do you always go to Catechism? "Because I am Catholic"; then thinking, she says, "Colored people are not Catholics, are they?"

SISTER RAT

I don't think many.

BROTHER RAT

"Well I am. I am a descendant of the Pope and Julius Caesar and the Virgin Mary." Julius Caesar? "Yes, Caesar was the Emperor of all Italia." And are you his descendant? "Yes," she said.

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

We wish we were descendants of this Caesar, we said, how holy you are, how holy and beautiful. She smiled.

BROTHER RAT

Our school had a picnic in the country and she took my hand. We walked to a place of white birch trees. It is our Palatine, she said. We are sailing to Italy, I said. She was the prettiest girl--the only thing, she

has worms in her hair.
SISTER RAT

Great Caesars my brother and I were. Behold us singing greatly walking across our Palatine, my brother holding my hand and I holding his and we are young before the War O Italia. Rosemary was our best friend and taught us Latin and told us stories of Italy. O Rosemary songs.

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

My sister and I when we were young before the War, and Rosemary our best friend, O Rosemary songs. Now we live in Rat's Chapel. My sister and I.

*(*BROTHER RAT *stares down the aisle.)*

BROTHER RAT

It is Rosemary.

(Stares.)

Did you tell? Does anyone know? Did you tell? Does anyone know? You started to cry Kay and I struck you in the face with our father's rifle. It was the beginning of summer. Just getting dark, we were playing and Rosemary said let's go to the playground. After you lay down on the slide so innocently Rosemary said if I loved her I would do what she said. Oh Kay. After that our hiding in the attic rats in the beam. Now there is snow on the playground, ambulances are on every street and within every ambulance is you Kay going to the hospital with a breakdown.

SISTER RAT

Blake, perhaps God will marry us in the State Hospital. Our fellow rats will attend us. Every day I look under our house to see who is listening.

(Aisle bright Procession marches out.)

I cry all the time now ... not sobbing ... Blake, did we really go on that slide together? What were those things made us do while she watched?

BROTHER RAT

We hide in the attic like rats.

SISTER RAT

I cry all the time now.

BROTHER RAT

Within every ambulance is you,

Kay. Sister, all the time.
SISTER RAT

(Sound rats.)

I am waiting for you Blake under the hospital so the Nazis won't see me.

(Procession marches to center.)

BROTHER RAT

The rat comes to the attic crying softly with her head down. She thinks she's going to have a baby. If I were a Nazi I'd shoot her. On the slide she said, Blake I am bleeding. Now there is blood on the aisle of our church. Before rat blood came onto the slide we sailed. We did not swing in chains before blood, we sang with Rosemary. Now I must go to battle.

(Heil. Salutes procession.)

Will you wait for me again at last spring?

(Procession does not answer. BROTHER *and* SISTER RAT *fall down and light candles*. BROTHER RAT *stands. Stares down aisle.)*

Will they wait for me at last spring Rosemary?

*(*ROSEMARY *comes down red aisle in her Holy Communion dress.)*

ROSEMARY

Blake the Nazis will get you on the battlefield.

(ROSEMARY *and* BROTHER RAT *stand before each other*. SISTER *remains kneeling.)*

BROTHER RAT

Rosemary atone us, take us beyond the Nazis. We must sail to the Capitol. Atone us. Deliver us unto your descendants.

ROSEMARY

The Nazis are going to get you.

BROTHER RAT

If you do not atone us Kay and I will die. We shall have to die to forget how every day this winter gray cats swing with sunflowers in their mouths because my

sister thinks I am the father of a baby. Rosemary will you not atone us?
ROSEMARY

I will never atone you. Perhaps you can put a bullet in your head with your father's shotgun, then your holy battle will be done.

(The procession is at the edge of the house.)

SISTER RAT

(Kneeling.)

O Holy Music return.

(The procession marches to center.)

ROSEMARY

Come with me, Blake.

BROTHER RAT

HOW can I ever reach last spring again if I come with you, Rosemary? I must forget how every day this winter gray cats swing with sunflowers in their mouths.

ROSEMARY

Perhaps you can put a bullet in your head.

SISTER RAT

I have a rat's belly.

BROTHER RAT

How can I ever again reach last spring if I come with you, Rosemary?

ROSEMARY

You must damn last spring in your heart. You will never see last spring again.

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

Then we must put a bullet in our heads.

(Procession marches out. Silence. They stare at ROSEMARY. *Procession returns.)*

PROCESSION

Goodbye Kay and Blake. We are leaving you.

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

Jesus, Joseph, Mary, Wise Men and Shepherd, do not leave. Great Caesars, we

will be again, you will behold us as we were before Rosemary with the worms in her hair, a spring can come after the War.
PROCESSION

What Kay and Blake?

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

A spring can come after the War when we grow up we will hang you so that we can run again, walk in the white birch trees. Jesus, Joseph, Wise Men, Shepherd, do not leave us.

PROCESSION

We are leaving because it was Easter.

BROTHER RAT

NO, no, it was not Easter, it was the beginning of June.

PROCESSION

In our minds it was Easter. Goodbye Kay and Blake.

(They walk out. A gnawing sound. SISTER RAT *kneels*, BROTHER RAT *and* ROSEMARY *face each other. A gnawing sound.)*

ROSEMARY

In my mind was a vision of us rats all.

BROTHER RAT

If only we could go back to our childhood.

SISTER RAT

Now there will always be rat blood on the rat walls of our rat house just like the blood that came onto the slide.

BROTHER RAT

Beyond my rat head there must remain a new Capitol where Great Kay and I will sing. But no within my shot head I see the dying baby Nazis and Georgia relatives screaming girls cursing boys a dark sun and my grave. I am damned. No ... when I grow up I will swing again in white trees because beyond this dark rat run and gnawed petals there will remain a Capitol.

SISTER RAT

A Cathedral.

BROTHER RAT

Now within my mind I forever see dying rats. And gray cats walking. Rosemary worms in her hair atop the slide. Our Holy songs in our parents' house weren't they beautiful.

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

Now it is our rat's mass.

(From now on their voices sound more like gnaws.)

She said if you love me you will. It seemed so innocent. She said it was like a wedding. Now my sister Kay sends me gnawed petals from sunflowers at the State Hospital. She puts them in gray envelopes. Alone I go out to school and the movies. No more do I call by for Rosemary. She made me promise never to tell if you love me she screamed you'll never tell. And I do love her. I found my father's rifle in the attic. Winter time ... gray time dark boys come laughing starting a game of horseshoes gnawing in the beams. The winter is a place of great gnawed sunflowers. I see them in every street in every room of our house. I pick up gnawed great yellow petals and pray to be atoned.

BROTHER RAT

I am praying to be atoned. I am praying to be atoned dear God. I am begging dear God to be atoned for the Holy Communion that existed between my sister and me and the love that I have for Rosemary, I am praying to be atoned.

(He kisses ROSEMARY. *He comes down aisle, movements more rat-like ... voice more like gnawing.)*

Bombs fall I am alone in our old house with an attic full of dead rat babies. I must hide.

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

God we ask you to stop throwing dead rat babies.

*(*BROTHER RAT *kneels.)*

BROTHER RAT

When I asked you yesterday the day they brought my sister Kay home from the State Hospital, you said God, Blake perhaps you must put a bullet in your head then your battle will be done. God, I think of Rosemary all the time. I love her. I told myself afterward it was one of the boys playing horseshoes who had done those horrible things on the slide with my sister. Yet I told Kay I am her keeper yet I told Rosemary I love her. It is the secret of

my battlefield.
SISTER RAT

Here we are again in our attic where we once played games, but neither of us liked it because from time to time you could hear the rats. But it was our place to be alone, Blake now that I am home from the hospital we must rid our minds of my rat's belly. Can you see it? You did not visit me in the hospital Brother Rat. Blake I thought you were my brother's keeper.

BROTHER RAT

Everywhere I go I step in your blood. Rosemary I wanted you to love me.

(He turns-aisles bright--gnawing sound--battlefield sounds.)

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

God is hanging and shooting us.

SISTER RAT

Remember Brother Rat before I bled, before descending bombs and death on our capitol we walked the Palatine ... we went to the movies. Now the Germans and Caesar's army are after us, Blake.

(He goes back to ROSEMARY *whose back is to him and starts.)*

ROSEMARY

The Nazis are after you. My greatest grief was your life together. My greatest grief.

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

(Look up.)

Now every time we will go outside we will walk over the grave of our dead baby Red aisle runners will be on the street when we come to the playground Rosemary will forever be atop the slide exalted with worms in her hair.

(They kneel then rise, kneel, then rise.)

We must very soon get rid of our rat heads so dying baby voices on the beams will no more say we are our lost Caesars.

ROSEMARY

It is our wedding now, Blake.

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

Brother and Sister Rat we are very soon we must.

SISTER RAT

We are rats in the beam now.

ROSEMARY

My greatest grief was your life together. The Nazis will come soon now.

BROTHER AND SLSTER RAT

Every time we go out red blood runners will be on the street.

(They kneel, then rise, kneel, then rise.)

At least soon very soon we will get rid of our rat heads and rat voices in beams will say no more we are your lost Caesars.

ROSEMARY

It is our wedding, Blake. The Nazis have come

(Marching.)

Brother and sister Rat you are now soon you will become headless and all will cease the dark sun will be bright no more and no more sounds of shooting in the distance.

(Marching procession appears bearing shotguns.)

BROTHER AND SISTER RAT

We will become headless and all will cease the dark sun will be bright no more and no more sounds of shooting in the distance. It will be the end.

(The procession shoots, they scamper, more shots, they fall, ROSEMARY *remains.)*

CURTAIN